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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000455

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S BREAKFAST WITH KDH CHAIRMAN PAVOL
HRUSOVSKY

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Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)
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11. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador hosted a one-on-one breakfast with Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) party Chairman and former Chairman of parliament Pavol Hrusovsky on June 8 to discuss the upcoming elections. Hrusovsky said Prime Minister Dzurinda's SDKU would be the most popular center-right party, receiving a mid-teen percentage of the vote; he predicted Smer would be the largest vote-getter overall, taking between 20-25 percent of the vote. Hungarian coalition party SMK, KDH, Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS, the party of former PM Vladimir Meciar), and nationalist party SNS will all receive around 10 percent. Hrusovsky thinks the missteps of Free Forum (SF) chairwoman Zuzana Martinakova will probably doom SF, and said the communists have an outside chance of winning seats in parliament. According to Hrusovsky, the big "unknown" was the relative distance between Smer and likely second place finisher SDKU. Hrusovsky said that KDH wants a "center-right" coalition, would like to hold the Justice and Interior Ministries, and hinted that cooperation with SNS was not entirely off the table. END SUMMARY.

KDH WOULD PRESENT ALTERNATIVE TO "CATASTROPHIC" COALITION

12. (C) Ambassador asked Hrusovsky about the oft-rumored combination of KDH, Smer and SMK -- noting that Smer's recent vitriolic attack on President Bush over Iraq had colored our view of the party. Fico had previously told us that Iraq would not be a Smer campaign issue, and his recent change of tactic (reftel) made us skeptical of his trustworthiness. Hrusovsky responded that he has worked in Parliament with Fico for many years and that Fico was "not to be trusted."

13. (C) Despite his lack of trust in Fico, Hrusovsky noted that a SMK-KDH-Smer combination was not his first choice, but could be presented to Fico as an alternative to a "catastrophic" Smer-SNS-HZDS coalition that public commentary and polling suggests is a distinct mathematical possibility. While noting that the SMK was best suited to be a Smer partner (NOTE: As an ethnic party, they have many members with views that were not necessarily center right. END NOTE), such a coalition would mean bridging the huge policy differences between KDH and Smer on a range of issues. Since Fico could not partner with SNS if he was working already with SMK, KDH was a logical third alternative, since Fico would not have to deal with the "crazy" and "bipolar" Meciar, who would "be nothing but headaches." (NOTE: Smer Vice Chairman Pavol Paska told DCM June 5 that his party would not be willing to accommodate and KDH demands to further codify the Vatican Treaty in Slovak law or to limit access to abortion -- two key elements of KDH's platform. MP Frantisek Miklosko has told us a future coalition between Smer and KDH

would have to contain a written agreement not to touch these issues for four years. END NOTE.)

14. (C) Asked what Ministries he would want in such a coalition, Hrusovsky noted that both former Interior Minister Vladimir Palko and former Justice Minister Daniel Lipsic had done extremely well, and KDH and would want those ministries again; but with Smer the dominant partner, these ministries would not be available. (Comment: Lipsic thinks any cooperation would be a sell-out of the party's principles, but does not rule out the possibility.)

WHO WANTS THE FOREIGN MINISTRY?

15. (C) Hrusovsky said KDH would be interested in the Foreign Ministry, but would never be accepted because their program -- including the implementation of four corollaries signed with the Vatican -- was often at odds with EU secularism. Hrusovsky also doubted that SMK could hold the post, as nationalists in all parties would be infuriated by the thought of having an ethnic Hungarian as the Foreign Minister of Slovakia. (Comment: An MFA contact and former KDH member said Slovakia simply was not yet ready for an ethnic Hungarian Foreign Minister.) KDH would likely be left with "social policy" ministries like Education, Culture, Health, or even Regional Development. Of course, Hrusovsky said, everybody who comes to the table for coalition negotiations would have a person ready to be nominated for every ministry.

KDH GOAL: CENTER-RIGHT COALITION, REDUX

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16. (C) Hrusovsky took pains to convey that a center-right coalition like the one that existed for the majority of the past four years (prior to KDH's withdrawal) was KDH's goal. When asked if KDH could "kiss and make up" with Dzurinda, Hrusovsky said this "is not a problem, everything will be worked out." He explained that KDH's biggest challenge is not personality conflict with SMK chairman Bela Bugar or PM Dzurinda, but with the mathematical necessity of finding a fourth coalition partner (as the latest polling gives the three center-right parties only 42 percent of parliamentary seats). The addition of HZDS would give them the numbers, but KDH members react viscerally to all the history that Meciar brings, and would have to find a way ("a well-thought out, written, and tamper-proof document") to limit the influence of Meciar, whom Hrusovsky called "a crook, and crazy."

POST-ELECTION STRATEGY

17. (C) One alternative KDH is considering is to court disaffected HZDS MPs after the election. Meciar, according to Hrusovsky, is particularly disillusioned with MP Viliam Veteska, who Meciar believes is freelancing too much for his own -- and not the party's -- well-being. Meciar believes Veteska is the only one smart enough to be a challenge to him in the party. However, Hrusovsky admits that Veteska -- who has old Russian connections and was one of Meciar's worst privatization beneficiaries -- might be more likely to cooperate with leftist parties. In addition, Meciar has "stacked" the party list with loyalists to prevent mutiny. If the worst aspects of Meciar's behavior could not be contained, KDH would need to take a long term view and not compromise their principles. "We would have more to gain by being in opposition to such reminders of the past" Hrusovsky told the Ambassador.

NO PARTY DIVISION AT KDH

17. (C) Ambassador asked about the apparent public schism in KDH between those who might prefer cooperation with Smer, and those that would like to coalesce with SMK and SDKU. This is all a game, Hrusovsky noted, meant to counter the impression that KDH is, by default, "for" Smer since they are quite publicly "against" HZDS. There is no party division, Hrusovsky assured the Ambassador, and KDH wants a center-right agenda.

WOULD HRUSOVSKY WORK WITH SNS?

18. (C) Hrusovsky's opinion of SNS chair Jan Slota rather alarmingly left open the possibility of SNS as a partner. While Hrusovsky dreaded attending the SNS-KDH-SMK debate later in the day, and condemned Slota for his rhetoric, he noted that all Slota needed to say is "I'm for Slovakia," and he would get 10 of the vote. Furthermore, if not drunk, Slota could be reasoned with. In addition, Hrusovsky downplayed the role of Gasparovic in shepherding potential coalition partners. Hrusovsky said Gasparovic is clearly in favor of Smer, but if he is presented with coalition partners who have the votes, "he can do nothing." As Hrusovsky noted, this has happened twice before.
VALLEE